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Youth dissuaded from Vice;

I N A

DISCOURSE,

Preached at

WEST-HAM, October 30, 1763,

B Y

WILLIAM DODD, M. A. K

Chaplain to the Right Reverend

THE LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S,

A N D

PREBENDARY OF BRECON.

L O N D O N:

Printed in the Year MDCCLXIII.

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IN A

DISCOURSE

Preached at

West-Ham, October 20, 1763

BY



WILLIAM D.D., M.A.

Chaplain to the Right Reverend

THE LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID.

AND

PREFENDARY OF BRECON.

L O N D O N :

Printed in the Year MDCCCLXIII.

(T O)

JOHN DORRIEN, Esq;

ACC E P T, dear Sir, as a small testimony of my esteem, this discourse, which owes its publication wholly to your request.

When I composed it for the pulpit, I had nothing in view, but the welfare of those to whom it was immediately and most affectionately addressed: and should no more have thought of printing it, than any other of my weekly compositions, had not You condescended to ask it: imagining, from too friendly a partiality perhaps, that it might thus be made more extensively useful; and justly thinking, that while such various methods are pursued to corrupt and debauch the minds of youth, some at least are necessary to counteract the poison, and prevent the dire effects of its malignity.

Happy should I be, if any efforts of mine might conduce to so salutary an end! However, there is a pleasure in meaning well: and be the success of the present little performance what it may, the opportunity

nity it affords me of publicly attesting my many obligations to you, is very satisfactory. Indeed I do not address you, to engage your esteem,——blessed be God, I am already happy in it!——nor to blazon your merit and virtue to the world,——they are already well known; and were they not, you cou'd rejoice in the truest source of reputation, an approving conscience. My intention is only to express the heart-felt complacence I have in your friendship, and to acknowledge gratefully your numberless kindnesses.

And permit me, ever dear Sir, to declare, that as I must always think your friendship one of the most distinguished blessings of my life; so, I am persuaded, it will give me comfort, even on the bed of death, to reflect, that I have been beloved and esteemed by so worthy a man, so steadfast a friend, and so sincere a Christian.

I am, Dear Sir,

Your most affectionate
and ever obliged friend,

West-Ham, Nov.

30, 1763.

WILLIAM DODD.

(2)
~~It may be advantageous therefore to take
a view of these vices; to show the progress
of the young man's ruin, as described in
the parable; that those of you, my beloved
young friends, who have not yet launched
out into the world, and have been thus
far happy in the contemplation of the
of industry, may be forever admonished by~~
LUKE XV. Ver. 13.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

TH E parable of the prodigal is no less beautiful and pathetic, than it is instructive and consolatory. It sets before us, in the most striking view, the progress and fatal consequence of Vice, on one hand; and on the other, the paternal readiness of our Almighty Father to receive the returning penitent to pardon and mercy. It is peculiarly instructive to Youth; and would become very instrumental to preserve them from the pernicious allurements of sin and folly, if they would seriously reflect upon it; if they would contemplate, in the example of the prodigal before them, the nature and the effects of those vices, which brought him to extreme distress, and which will ever bring to distress all those who indulge them.

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It may be advantageous therefore to take a view of these vices ; to shew the progress of the young man's ruin, as described in the parable ; that those of you, my beloved young friends, who have not yet launched out into the world, and have been thus far happily secured from the dire contagion of iniquity, may persevere, admonished by the example, in the happy paths of sobriety and religion :——that those of you, who have made any false steps, and have turned aside at all from these happy paths, may, at least, check your progress, may stand still, and consider what the issue of a further advance will be ; and may return, warned by the unavoidable dangers, to the ways of virtue and truth :——Ways, which never youth repented that he had early and diligently trod ; though thousands have sad cause to repent that they ever forsook them, in ruined health, ruined fortune, ruined reputation, ruined peace and hope ! God Almighty forbid, that this should be the case of any amongst you ! Oh ! may his grace preserve and protect you ! And let me entreat, that as no motive, but an earnest wish for your real welfare, could induce me to lay these truths before you, let me therefore entreat, that you will give them a serious hearing now, and an impartial con-

consideration afterwards. And if what is offered doth not approve itself to be conducive to your best, present and future happiness, reject and despise it: But if reason, experience, and religion, all unite to attest the truth; resist not these: but make me happy, rather make your beloved parents and friends happy, by chusing that better part, which we wish to recommend to your choice, for this single reason only, because it will infallibly produce your own felicity.

The younger son in the parable thought not so: the experience and advice of his father were by no means sufficient for him: he thought himself much wiser (no doubt) than the preaching old man; and heard, as is often the case with youth, his good father's counsels with a weary and painful attention; supposing, that he wished to with-hold him from happiness! Vain and unthinking! as if a tender parent would ever grudge his child any true and proper satisfaction. He was determined, however, to judge for himself; and to be wise by his own experience. *Pride* had got footing in his heart; and now impatient of parental dominion, and anxious for independence, he requests his father to give him that independence. The good man, wearied,

perhaps, by his importunities, grants him his wish, and permits him to make the hazardous trial.

No sooner is he in possession of the portion allotted him, than he hastes away with it, far from the presence of that indulgent parent, who possibly by much fatigue and much anxiety had procured this fortune for his son; and now all his parental love and care is repaid by a base detestation of him, by an ungrateful removal from his presence; which, indeed, could not fail to be irksome to a young man, determined upon a course of gaiety; as, no doubt, he would call a life of disobedience to his father, destruction to himself, and contempt of his God.—For such was the life he led.

He fell into a course of riot and prodigality, indulging all those youthful lusts, which in the heat of blood, are fancied the sole enjoyments, are called the only pleasures! — Prodigality and riotous living necessarily infer idleness, foppery, and bad company of every sort; and who is there proof against these? what health, or what fortune are sufficient to support them? None ever was, or ever will be; and therefore no wonder they brought our young adventurer

ture to destruction. "He wasted all his substance in riotous living; — he devoured his estate with harlots!" we are told; and the sad consequence to him was neglect, contempt and beggary: he was now despised by all, whom he had fed and supported in his day of riot and extravagance: contemned even by those who had shared his bounty, and hastened his ruin! — wretches who have no bowels or feeling, no generosity or honour; and who never have but one motive for their regard, the motive of their own immediate interest. Cast out, and scorned by all; he was reduced to the utmost extremity, ready to perish with hunger; and in this sad case, once more bethought him of his affectionate parent, whom he had so ungratefully used, and to whom, in a miserable plight, all humble and submissive, at length, he returns! While to witness the amiable force of parental affection, the tender father, we are informed, melted to behold his suffering child, relented, forgave, and received him to his bosom and his love!

Now let us observe, in this fine picture, the steps, by which the prodigal advanced to his ruin.

i. Impatience of parental controul, and a desire of independency, was the first bad temper which shewed itself in his mind, and which led on to every future evil. A temper, too apt to arise in the minds of youth, and springing from that pride, which is, alas! but too deeply rooted in our corrupt nature, and which cannot be subdued and kept under too much by early culture. For when once this fond desire of acting, without all restraint, and indulging its own inclination, gets possession of a youthful heart, the gentle authority even of the most kind and prudent parents too commonly becomes a burden; all their tender remonstrances are overlooked or disregarded: or, at least, considered only as intended to fix and continue that restraint, which the eager youth so much wishes to overleap.

2. It is no wonder, when this impatience of parental controul strongly operates on the mind, that the presence and observation of a parent is of all things most displeasing, and consequently, of all things most to be avoided: this was the second bad disposition, which the prodigal discovered. Soon as he gained his allotted portion, he took his journey into a far country: he retreated far as possible from the eye and notice of his

his father, whose advice and remonstrances, as he was determined not to regard, he was determined not to hear, or be molested by them. And thus it is with those who tread in steps like his. If they cannot remove to a distance from their parents, they will, at least, secrete their actions from them to the utmost of their power. A certain bad sign, and ever to be dreaded in all youthful hearts! For, why should you wish to secrete any thing from those who love you with the most tender affection, and who are more interested in your welfare, than they are even in their own? what you keep secret from them must either be a matter of advantage or evil: if it be the former, you act most unkindly by them; as the knowledge of it would give them the greatest satisfaction: but if, as is generally the case, what you keep private is vicious and detrimental, think how simple a part you act, in harbouring thoughts, or doing deeds, which you dare not discover to them, who love you better than themselves: and who certainly, not only by their love, but by their knowledge, are best fitted to advise what is most for your good; and consequently should never be kept in ignorance of any of your designs or connections.

3. Determined, however, to gratify his passions, the youth is deaf to every argument

ment of affection and utility; till, like the prodigal, he commences *riotous liver*: this is the certain consequence of youthful independence, and a disregard of parents. This riotous living includes, not only an indulgence of lust and criminal passions; but a waste of present substance by all the destructive ways of prodigality; idleness; dissipation with bad company; the wretched foppery of dress; and all the abuse of language by lying, swearing, and obscenity.

Now let the youth, in the coolness of reflexion, seriously review a life spent amidst vices like these, and consider, whether it is possible to attain, by such a life, the end at which he aims. All reasonable creatures act with some end: and the end, which young people propose to themselves, is the obtaining of pleasure, or at least, of higher pleasure, than that which parental restraint allows. But how shall they judge, who yet have seen or known little of mankind and the world, in what consists their best and truest pleasure? If they are actuated only by self-opinion and conceit, if they judge themselves superior in wisdom to all with whom they are connected; it is reasonable, either that they should give some proof of such superior wisdom,

wisdom, or, at least, be taught that high self-opinion is always an indication of a want of wisdom, which ever dwells with humility.—If then they are not so opinionated as to deem themselves wiser than others, they may reasonably be expected to listen to the information of those, who have lived longer and known more of the world, than themselves. And the joint voice of all such will be, — that the indulgence of youthful lusts necessarily leads to ruin and to misery: that bad Company, whether of the male or female kind, but the latter more especially, is the surest bane, and the most poisonous corrupter, of all good principles, and all good manners: that idleness is the root of all evil, introductory of almost every vice: that foppery, and an absurd affectation of dress ever tend to make ridiculous, and raise only the smiles and contempt of the judicious; who have long been agreed, that *neatness, decency,* and *propriety*, are, in this respect, the true ornaments: that lying is a most mean and abject vice, rendering youth as dangerous as despicable, and sowing the seeds of a very worthless and contemptible character in future life: that swearing or obscenity in discourse are utterly inexcusable, as having no plea of pleasure or utility to urge in their defence, as being the greatest affront to the

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Majesty of heaven, and the surest indication of a very depraved, as well as of a very weak mind: that prodigality will certainly end in the ruin of all temporal substance, and never procures a friend; for all men, even the most abandoned, however they may help to drain him, always despise the thoughtless prodigal: it is by true generosity and benevolence, whose foundation is laid in prudent œconomy, that the friendship and love of mankind are secured.

Now if youth would only be so wise, as to listen to these truths, they could not fail to have an effect upon them; especially if they would consider, that these truths are so well known and approved, that all men are agreed in them; they are not matters of any doubt or speculation; they are as certain and determinate, as the existence of the sun himself in the heavens: and as there can be no question, that the indulgence of the vices here specified tends to misery, sorrow and ruin, more or less, conformable to that of the young man's in the parable; so can there, on the other hand, be no doubt, but the avoiding of these vices, and the cultivation of the contrary virtues, will, by the grace of God,
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produce present peace and future happiness.

Suffer me, therefore, my young friends, earnestly to exhort you to grow wise from this example of the prodigal; and to learn from thence what you should chuse, and what you should shun, to make you, — what I am sure you all wish to be, — a blessing to yourselves, a comfort to your parents, and an ornament to our holy religion.

To this end, seriously reflect on the steps, by which *his* ruin was perfected; and enquire, whether it is not in the very nature of those vices, which he indulged, always and in every instance, to produce the effects which he experienced. Search, and know, whether ever any man procured true happiness, or confessed that he enjoyed solid comfort from the unlimited gratification of his passions, from his neglect of duty and of God: search, and know, whether thousands have not most severely felt the sad effects of such gratifications, and deplored, in extreme distress, their fatal consequences: whether thousands, disregarded in youth of counsel and restraint, have not brought themselves into the most calamitous circumstances of fortune,

of body, and of soul. — On the other hand, search and enquire diligently, whether any man was ever yet found upon the earth, who regretted at the close of life, that he had too cautiously avoided the snares and evils of youthful lusts; that he had too soon entered upon the paths of virtue and religion; that he had served his God, and obeyed the holy rules of his divine Saviour, too much or too exactly.---An instance of this sort was never yet heard of: and surely no stronger argument can be urged in behalf of virtue, and of that preference, which you ought to give it in your choice.

Let it, too, be a consideration of no small weight with you, that the more carefully you walk in the paths of sobriety during your early days; the more diligently you guard against the entrance of every vice, and prevent it from becoming in any degree habitual, the more easy will you find it to persevere: whereas, if once vice gains an entrance, much more if it becomes habitual, you will find the retreat difficult and embarrassed: and, perhaps, from the strong power of habit, may be led on in the gratification of what your better judgment disapproves, and consequently must perpetually condemn.

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Beware, therefore, of beginnings! be cautious of your first steps! preserve yourselves pure! * and let temptations to *independence* and impatience of parental controul especially be checked in their first rise. The better to effect which, arm yourselves with every proper consideration; particularly remember, that whatever inclinations you may have to a freedom from restraint, your parents must certainly be the best judges of your propriety for such freedom. If therefore they restrain your inclinations, never receive their controul with impatience; but always think thus, " My parents have, doubtless, the tenderest affection for me; I have had innumerable proofs of their love; and I can never suppose, that the good father, who has taken such kind care of me hitherto; that the beloved mother, who so tenderly supported me at her own breast, and has always shewn the most solicitous attention to my welfare: I can never suppose that they would restrain me from any thing which would make me truly happy; that they

* *Flee youthful lusts*; was St. Paul's advice, even to Timothy, and consequently cannot be unworthy the best attention of every young person.

would

would ever advise me to any thing, but what will lead to my good. They have lived longer, seen and known more, and are wiser than myself. — I am determined, therefore, to subdue my own inclinations, and contentedly to acquiesce in all their counsels and directions, assured, they will ever advise me for the best.”

Fixed in such a determination; — and which of you can deny that such a determination is most wise and reasonable? — and joining to it a constant attention to duty, and a care to approve yourselves in the eyes of your divine Redeemer, you will need but few directions more to guard you from evil. — This wise resolution, invariably pursued, you will find your best preservative.

Conducted by it, you will have no need to fly, like the prodigal, from the presence and observation of your parents: you will have no need to secrete yourself or your actions from them. — On the contrary, the company and presence of your parents will be most delightful to you: an ingenuous frankness and openness will prevail between you; and you will find an unspeakable serenity and satisfaction in administering to the best comforts of those, to whom

whom you owe the highest obligations ; and, by an endeavour to return which, in some degree at least, there is, be sure, the highest pleasure. As it is impossible to conceive either an object more hateful, or a pain more afflicting, than that of a child, by a life of disobedience and immorality, wracking the good heart of an affectionate and endearing parent !

Oh ! my young friends, I am persuaded, you have too much ingenuity, generosity, and tenderness of soul, ever to act so ungrateful a part, ever to occasion so deep a sorrow ! at least, if you expect happiness here or hereafter, if you expect favour either from God or man, avoid so base an evil ! and by lives of duty and religion, by a conscientious denial and subdual of all youthful lusts, by avoiding all bad company and connections, by diligently employing yourselves, and by keeping your tongues from all indecency and offence, endear yourselves more and more to your parents ; give them cause to bless God perpetually for you ; give them cause to rejoice, that amidst all the temptations of vice, amidst all the perils, which so abundantly surround unwary youth in our days, and in the metropolis especially, where every step should be taken with the utmost caution ;

tion ; give them cause to rejoice, that God's goodness hath preserved you unpol-
luted, and that you live a blessing to them,
and a child of a better, even an everlasting
father ! What consolation must arise in
the breast of a parent on that thought ;
when beholding his child, he beholds a
child, also, of virtue and of God : and
when, in the hour of death, his affec-
tionate eyes are closed by that dear child,
whom he doubts not to meet again, ere
long, in everlasting bliss !

Give then, oh ! give this exquisite feli-
city to your parents. To which end begin
early, contend resolutely, and maintain
your ground perseveringly. Think, on
one hand, what a divine pleasure must
transfuse itself through that mind, which
can enjoy the satisfaction above-mention-
ed ; and, on the other hand, take a brief
view of the anguish, which must afflict
the souls both of that parent and that
child, in the circumstances of those re-
presented in the parable.

Make the case your own : you are now
blest with fond and indulgent parents :
suppose yourself uneasy under their re-
straint, and, at length, become indepen-
dent of them, and following your own in-
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clinations ; and, suppose,—what too surely would be found the case, if you were to be so unhappy as to fall into such a method of life ; which God forbid!—yet, suppose, that indulging those inclinations to the full, surrounded with bad company, prodigal, wasteful, riotous, and idle ; lulled on the lap of harlots, and reclined on the bed of sensuality ; forgetful of every thing virtuous and praise-worthy ; your mind drunk and intoxicated as it were with lust and vice ; —— Suppose, that the unavoidable consequences of such a life have befallen you ; and that now, like the prodigal, your substance all wasted, your friends, mere summer friends ! all flown, your health, perhaps, greatly injured, your reputation ruined, and yourself in extreme pain and penury : —— Suppose, in this sad case, you see yourself returning to the once-loved house of your affectionate parents ! Oh ! with what anxious horror would you then enter those gates, and cross that threshold, as a stranger, and an out-cast, which you now enter, you now cross with so much delight and freedom : —— with what inexpressible anguish wou'd you meet those parents, whom now you see with such pleasing satisfaction ! Imagine that you behold the mother you love, bathed in tears of anguish and distress,

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running to embrace her ruined child. Imagine, that you see your beloved father, grown old in cares and sorrows upon your account; turning his weeping face away from you, and unable to sustain the shock of your wretched appearance! Imagine the inexpressible torture which must arise in your own heart, on seeing the grief you occasion, on feeling that your ill-conduct has been the cause of it all. And as you would wish to avoid such anguish yourself, much more as you wish to save your beloved parents from such anguish; carefully avoid every thing, which may, in the least degree, tend to the introduction of so sad a catastrophe. Carefully avoid every thing which may give rise to the least probability of so complicated a distress. To which end, bear the contrast in mind, which I have here pictured out, the contrast of the virtuous and dutiful child closing the eyes of a beloved and blessing parent; and that of a disobedient and worthless one, returning home to his parents in ruin, poverty, and distress.

And as the contrast cannot fail to influence your minds by God's grace, so be assured, that if not in exactly the same degree and manner, yet, the certain consequence of obedience and virtue, is peace
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and life ; — of disobedience and indulgence in forbidden and unallowed gratifications, is misery, is ruin, is present and eternal sorrow.

F I N I S.